

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
-----047808 192149Z /46
O 192045Z MAY 78
FM AMEMBASSY ROME
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2942

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 3 ROME 9350

EXDIS

FOR GEORGE VEST FROM THE AMBASSADOR

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: OVIP, PEPR, IT
SUBJECT: PRESIDENTIAL VISIT

REF: STATE 124449

1. ALTHOUGH THERE ARE CERTAIN RISKS INVOLVED IN A PRESIDENTIAL VISIT TO ITALY IN JULY, I BELIEVE THE ADVANTAGES OF THE PRESIDENT'S COMING HERE CLEARLY OUTWEIGH THE POTENTIAL PROBLEMS. THIS TELEGRAM OUTLINES THE MAJOR PROS AND CONS WHICH WE CAN THEN FURTHER DISCUSS WHILE I AM IN WASHINGTON. IN SUBMITTING THIS MESSAGE I WISH TO STRESS THE IMPORTANCE I ATTACH, FOR REASONS STATED BELOW, TO DELAYING ANNOUNCEMENT OF A VISIT, IF A POSITIVE DECISION IS TAKEN, AS LONG AS IS FEASIBLY POSSIBLE.

ARGUMENTS IN FAVOR OF THE VISIT

2. WERE A PRESIDENTIAL VISIT JUST TO ITALY UNDER CONSIDERATION, SERIOUS QUESTION MIGHT BE RAISED WHETHER JULY IS THE IDEAL MOMENT FOR THE PRESIDENT TO COME TO ROME. HOWEVER, SINCE THE PRESIDENT HAS ALREADY MADE A DECISION TO ATTEND THE ECONOMIC SUMMIT, AND PARTICULARLY IF

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HE FOLLOWS THE SUMMIT WITH VISITS TO YUGOSLAVIA AND/OR SPAIN, I AM OF THE OPINION THAT THE QUESTION WHETHER TO INCLUDE ITALY SHOULD BE ANSWERED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE.

3. FIRST, ITALY WILL BE, AFTER THE BONN SUMMIT, THE ONLY MAJOR EUROPEAN ALLY WHICH THE PRESIDNT HAS NOT VISITED. EVERY PRESIDENT FROM EISENHOWER TO FORD HAS

MADE A STATE VISIT TO ITALY--INCLUDING A CALL ON THE POPE. PRESIDENT CARTER'S FAILURE TO VISIT ITALY ON HIS THIRD TRIP TO EUROPE SINCE HIS INAUGURATION WOULD CAUSE DOUBTS IN THE MINDS OF MANY ITALIANS ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIP OF OUR TWO COUNTRIES. THE SITUATION IN ITALY IS POLITICALLY FRAGILE, TROUBLED BY SERIOUS STRUCTURAL ECONOMIC PROBLEMS, PLAGUED WITH CONSTANT ARMED TERRORISM. IT IS A DIFFICULT PERIOD FOR ITALY AND IT IS IN OUR INTEREST TO PROVIDE WHATEVER SUPPORT WE CAN AND TO EMPHASIZE ITALY'S LINKS WITH OTHER WESTERN DEMOCRACIES. THE ADMINISTRATION HAS MADE IT CLEAR TIME AND AGAIN THAT THE UNITED STATES CONSIDERS ITALY TO BE A KEY COUNTRY--A COUNTRY IN THE INNERMOST CIRCLE OF OUR FRIENDS AND ALLIES. SUCH A RELATIONSHIP CANNOT BE MAINTAINED IN THE WORLD TODAY IN THE ABSENCE OF FREQUENT, DIRECT CONTACTS AT THE HEAD OF GOVERNMENT LEVEL, FOR WHICH MULTI-LATERAL MEETINGS SUCH AS THE NATO AND ECONOMIC SUMMITS CANNOT SUBSTITUTE. A PRESIDENTIAL VISIT, THEN, WOULD REENFORCE TO THE ITALIANS OUR RECOGNITION OF THEIR COUNTRY'S IMPORTANCE TO THE UNITED STATES AND WOULD AVOID WHAT THE ITALIANS WOULD PERCEIVE AS AN AFFRONT IF THE PRESIDENT WERE TO VISIT EUROPE AGAIN WITHOUT VISITING ITALY.

4. SECOND, ITALY IS EXTREMELY SENSITIVE ABOUT HER SECRET

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POSITION IN EUROPE AND A VISIT BY THE PRESIDENT TO OTHER COUNTRIES, SUCH AS SPAIN, WHICH ARE NEITHER ALLIES NOR OF THE SAME INTERNATIONAL RANK, WOULD BE SEEN AS AN AFFRONT. MOREOVER, IT IS IN OUR INTEREST TO LINK ITALY AS CLOSELY AS POSSIBLE TO THE DEMOCRACIES OF THE NORTH, AND NOT TO TREAT IT AS MARGINAL IN ANY SENSE.

5. THIRD, THE ITALIAN GOVERNMENT WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY WELCOME A PRESIDENTIAL VISIT, AND OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE GOVERNMENT WOULD BE STRENGTHENED AS A RESULT. IN PARTICULAR, COMING AT A TIME WHEN THE GOVERNMENT HAS SHOWN FIRMNESS AND GREAT COURAGE IN THE FACE OF TERRORISM AND FOLLOWING ADMINISTRATIVE ELECTIONS IN WHICH THE COMMUNISTS HAVE BEEN DEALT A POLITICAL BLOW, A VISIT, IF CAREFULLY AND PROPERLY PLANNED, COULD BE USED BOTH IN PRIVATE MEETINGS AND THROUGH PUBLIC ACTIVITIES TO ENCOURAGE ITALY'S DEMOCRATIC FORCES.

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INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
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EXDIS

FOR GEORGE VEST FROM THE AMBASSADOR

6. FOURTH, A PRESIDENTIAL VISIT WOULD ENHANCE
AMERICAN POPULARITY IN ITALY AND WOULD NO DOUBT BE
GREATLY WELCOMED BY THE ITALO-AMERICAN POPULATION
IN THE UNITED STATES.

7. FIFTH, ANY STATE VISIT TO ITALY MUST BE CONSIDERED
JOINTLY WITH A VISIT TO THE POPE. THE COMMENTS
ABOVE ABOUT THE EXPECTATIONS OF A VISIT TO ITALY APPLY
EQUALLY TO THE POPE. THE SPIRITUAL LEADER OF ONE
OF AMERICA'S AND THE WORLD'S MAJOR RELIGIONS, THE
POPE IS A LEADING MORAL FORCE IN THE WORLD. AS
SUCH HE IS DEEPLY INTERESTED IN AND CONCERNED ABOUT
MANY LEADING ISSUES, SUCH AS HUMAN RIGHTS, DISARMAMENT
AND THE MIDDLE EAST, AND INDEED HE CAN EXERT AN
INFLUENCE OVER POLICIES AND DEVELOPMENTS IN MANY AREAS
OF THE WORLD. THUS, IN SUBSTANTIVE AS WELL
AS FORMAL TERMS, A VISIT BY THE PRESIDENT TO THE
POPE WOULD BE MOST USEFUL TO THE PURSUANCE OF U.S.
OBJECTIVES.

RISKS OF A VISIT

8. I RECOGNIZE THAT THERE ARE SEVERAL SERIOUS RISKS
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INVOLVED IN A VISIT. THE POLITICAL AND SECURITY
SITUATION IN ITALY WILL CONTINUE TO BE VERY FLUID AND

THERE ARE SEVERAL POTENTIAL DANGERS ON THE HORIZON.

9. FIRST, ALL INDICATIONS ARE THAT TERRORISM IN ITALY WILL CONTINUE AT A SERIOUS LEVEL; ANOTHER STRIKE BY THE RED BRIGADES AGAINST A PROMINENT POLITICAL LEADER IS POSSIBLE AND, INDEED, EXPECTED BY MANY. A PRESIDENTIAL VISIT COULD COINCIDE WITH A PERIOD OF SERIOUS CRISIS WHEN THE GOVERNMENT WOULD BE COMPLETELY PRE-OCCUPIED WITH HANDLING ANOTHER MAJOR TERRORIST INCIDENT. IT IS ALSO CONCEIVABLE THAT SUCH AN INCIDENT COULD PRECIPITATE CALLS FOR AN EMERGENCY GOVERNMENT AND THEREBY IMPOSE A GOVERNMENT CRISIS ON TOP OF A CRISIS IN CIVIL ORDER. A PRESIDENTIAL VISIT AT SUCH A TIME COULD BE EXTREMELY DIFFICULT BOTH FOR THE PRESIDENT AND FOR ITALIAN OFFICIALS. YET, ONCE ANNOUNCED, A VISIT COULD BE CANCELLED ONLY WITH EMBARRASSMENT TO BOTH SIDES AND WITH A FURTHER ADVANCEMENT OF THE RED BRIGADES' PRESTIGE.

10. SECOND, A PRESIDENTIAL VISIT COULD APPEAR TO SANCTION THE PRESENT GOVERNING ARRANGEMENT IN WHICH THE COMMUNISTS PARTICIPATE IN THE PARLIAMENTARY MAJORITY. THE COMMUNIST AND LEFTIST PRESS WOULD PLAY A VISIT THAT WAY, AS THEY DID WHEN ANDREOTTI VISITED WASHINGTON IN JULY OF LAST YEAR. THE ITALIAN PEOPLE AND ITALIAN POLITICIANS WILL LISTEN WITH GREAT ATTENTION TO WHAT THE PRESIDENT SAYS AND WILL WATCH CAREFULLY EVERYTHING HE DOES WHILE HE IS HERE. IN PARTICULARN THE STATEMENTS HE MAKES WILL BE METICULOUSLY COMPARED WITH THE DEPARTMENT'S JANUARY 12 DECLARATION ON COMMUNIST PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNING

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ITALY. CAREFUL PREPARATION WILL BE NECESSARY TO MINIMIZE THE RISKS OF OUR APPEARING TO ACCEPT OR, WORSE, TO APPROVE A GOVERNMENT SUPPORTED BY THE COMMUNISTS OR IN WHICH THEY PARTICIPATE.

11. THIRD, THE COMMUNIST PARTY CAN BE EXPECTED TO TAKE EVERY POSSIBLE ADVANTAGE OF THE VISIT TO ADVANCE ITS PARTISAN INTERESTS. IT WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE FOR PROTOCOL REASONS TO AVOID THE PARTICIPATION OF SOME COMMUNISTS, SUCH AS CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES PRESIDENT INGRAO, WHO OCCUPY OFFICIAL POSITIONS. AS FOR COMMUNIST PARTY OFFICIALS, SUCH AS SECRETARY GENERAL BERLINGUER, WE WOULD MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO KEEP THEM OUT OF PARTICIPATION IN THE PRESIDENT'S PROGRAM, BUT GIVEN ITALIAN POLITICAL REALITIES WE CANNOT STATE WITH ANY DEGREE OF CERTAINTY THAT THIS WOULD BE SUCCESSFUL. THUS, THE PRESIDENT WILL MEET--AND POSSIBLY

BE PHOTOGRAPHED--WITH VARIOUS PCI LEADERS, AND THESE PHOTOGRAPHS WOULD BE WIDELY PUBLISHED IN BOTH ITALY AND AMERICA. THESE ENCOUNTERS WOULD BE USED BY THE COMMUNISTS AS A SIGN OF AMERICAN APPROVAL OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY AND OF ITS PARTICIPATION IN THE PARLIAMENTARY MAJORITY. (SUCH ENCOUNTERS MAY ALSO HAVE AN IMPACT ON AMERICAN DOMESTIC POLITICS.)

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S E C R E T SECTION 3 OF 3 ROME 9350

EXDIS

FOR GEORGE VEST FROM THE AMBASSADOR

12. FOURTH, WE DO NOT EXCLUDE THAT A PRESIDENTIAL PRESENCE IN ITALY WOULD LEAD TO ANTI-AMERICAN DEMONSTRATIONS BY ELEMENTS OF THE EXTREME LEFT. ALTHOUGH THESE WOULD NOT IN AND OF THEMSELVES AFFECT SECURITY ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE PRESIDENT, THEY WOULD DETRACT FROM THE VISIT, ESPECIALLY IF THEY LED TO A CONFRONTATION WITH THE PUBLIC SECURITY FORCES.

SECURITY

13. GIVEN THE CONTINUING SERIOUS TERRORIST THREAT IN ITALY, SECURITY MUST BE WEIGHED AS AN IMPORTANT FACTOR IN CONSIDERATION OF A PRESIDENTIAL VISIT. THOUGHT MUST NOT ONLY BE GIVEN TO PROTECTING THE PRESIDENT, BUT TO ASSURING THE SAFETY OF ALL THE MEMBERS OF HIS PARTY INCLUDING THE LARGE NUMBER OF PRESS WHO WILL SURELY ACCOMPANY HIM. I DO NOT FEEL COMPETENT TO ADDRESS THIS QUESTION IN A DEFINITIVE MANNER ALTHOUGH THE RSO BELIEVES THAT THE ITALIAN SECURITY SERVICES CAN PROVIDE ADEQUATE SECURITY PROTECTION FOR THE PRESIDENT DURING A VISIT HERE.

IN MAKING ANY DETAILED ARRANGEMENTS, IT SHOULD BE
BORNE IN MIND THAT SECURITY FACTORS WOULD LIMIT
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DIRECT PUBLIC EXPOSURE TO A BARE MINIMUM AND WOULD
CERTAINLY PRECLUDE DIRECT CONTACT WITH CROWDS.

RECENT ELECTION RESULTS

14. WE DO NOT THINK THAT THE RECENT ELECTION RESULTS
OR THE POLITICAL IMPACT OF THE MORO ASSASSINATION
ARE LIKELY TO ALTER THE PRESENT GOVERNING ARRANGEMENT
DURING THE NEXT SIX MONTHS. AS STATED IN ROME 8928,
UNLESS THERE IS ANOTHER MAJOR TERRORIST INCIDENT OR
SOME OTHER IMPORTANT UNFORESEEN DEVELOPMENT, WE
ANTICIPATE THAT THE PRESENT ARRANGEMENTS WILL LAST
AT LEAST THROUGH THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN
DECEMBER.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

15. IF WE WERE PLANNING A VISIT TO ITALY UNRELATED
TO OTHER PRESIDENTIAL TRAVEL, I WOULD URGE THAT WE
LOOK TO NEXT YEAR, AFTER THE ELECTION OF A NEW ITALIAN
PRESIDENT IN DECEMBER AND THE CHANGES THAT WILL
PROBABLY FOLLOW IT. HOWEVER, I STRONGLY BELIEVE THE
PRESIDENT SHOULD VISIT ITALY IN JULY SINCE HE IS
ALREADY COMMITTED TO ATTENDING THE ECONOMIC SUMMIT
AND PARTICULARLY IF HE IS TO VISIT EUROPEAN COUNTRIES
OTHER THAN THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY. THERE
WILL BE RISKS AND PROBLEMS, AND THERE ARE DIFFERING
VIEWS WITHIN THE MISSION AS TO HOW MANAGEABLE THEY
ARE. HOWEVER, I BELIEVE THEY ARE MANAGEABLE,
ALTHOUGH TO MANAGE THEM EFFECTIVELY WILL REQUIRE
CAREFUL AND THOROUGH PREPARATORY WORK BOTH HERE AND IN
WASHINGTON. IN PARTICULAR, IN CONFRONTING THE
COMMUNIST QUESTION THE PRESIDENT WILL HAVE TO WALK

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THE FINE LINE BETWEEN NON-INTERFERENCE AND LEAVING
NO MISTAKE ABOUT OUR VIEWS ON PCI PARTICIPATION IN
THE GOVERNMENT AS EXPRESSED IN THE JANUARY 12 STATEMENT.
THE FORUM FOR THIS COULD INCLUDE A MAJOR SPEECH, A
PRESS CONFERENCE OR A TOAST. THE THEME
TO BE EMPHASIZED IS ITALY'S TIES WITH THE UNITED
STATES AND THE WEST. FINALLY, GIVEN THE INSTABLE

AND TROUBLED POLITICAL AND SECURITY SITUATION, IT
WOULD CLEARLY BE PRUDENT TO DELAY A PUBLIC ANNOUNCE-
MENT AS LONG AS POSSIBLE.GARDNER

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptoning: Z
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: FOREIGN RELATIONS, VISITS, INTELLIGENCE ASSESSMENTS, POLITICAL SITUATION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 19 may 1978
Decapton Date: 20 Mar 2014
Decapton Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978ROME09350
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780212-0117
Format: TEL
From: ROME
Handling Restrictions:
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780539/aaaabhm.tel
Line Count: 335
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: b381179a-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION SS
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 7
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Reference: 78 STATE 124449
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 23 may 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2634192
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: PRESIDENTIAL VISIT
TAGS: OVIP, PEPR, IT, (CARTER, JIMMY)
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvgwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/b381179a-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014